

# **SPEAKING NOTES – ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE MUSIC COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**

**ANU SCHOOL OF MUSIC**

**12 SEPTEMBER 2011 – 11AM**

## **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Richard Eccles, I am Deputy Secretary in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, with responsibility for the arts and sports.

In particular, I am very pleased to be speaking to you, the assembled Music Council at your annual assembly.

Because the issues you are discussing, over the weekend and today, strike at the very core of arts, culture and creativity in a 21 century Australia.

Today I would like to talk to you about the development of the National Cultural Policy; the opportunities for your engagement in the development of the policy; and some observations about the importance of music in this discussion.

There will be opportunities for questions at the end of this presentation.

## **The National Cultural Policy**

On 11 August, the Minister for the Arts, Simon Crean launched the consultation framework for the development of a National Cultural Policy.

The time is right for a new strategic plan to cover how the Federal Government supports the arts; what it supports; how it supports it. Because Australia is a vastly different nation to the one that was around when Prime Minister Whitlam announced the creation of the Australia Council for the Arts, or when Prime Minister Keating launched *Creative Nation*.

And arguably, the structures and priorities we have in place could do with a refresh.

The fundamental rationale behind a new National Cultural Policy is to ensure that what is supported, and the way that it is supported reflects the goals, aspirations and diversity of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia.

Because Australia is a very different country to what it was even 20 years ago. Our population make-up, and accordingly our aspirations and sense of identity; the technological opportunities; our international standing; are factors that all should influence our creative and cultural agenda.

And we are a nation that is changing.

For example:

- **Great diversity in our population** – reflecting the fact that nearly half (over 43%) of our people were either born overseas or have a parent who was;
- Since 1945 there have been more than 7 million migrants – most recent trends from Asia, Africa and the Middle East – as well as the more traditional sources, the UK and Europe.
- **Technology** has given us significant opportunities – to improve access, to change how we present our stories, to change how we ‘create’: we know that household internet access has quadrupled to 72% in a decade; and that more than half of our young people (15-24) to research, view, or create their ‘art’;
- The Economist ranked Australia 9<sup>th</sup> out of 69 nations in terms of ‘e-readiness’ and first in the Asia-Pacific region. We are equal second in the world for our ‘e-literate’ social and cultural environment;
- We are highly **educated** – 61% of adults (25-64) have vocational or tertiary education; our tertiary graduation rate is the highest in the OECD;
- We are increasing our understanding of, and our pride in the cultural value of **our oldest population** – and we celebrate more and more their contribution to the fabric of our nation;
- We are **wealthy**, prosperous and growing – since 1990 our economy has grown in real terms on average by around 3.3%.

- People have justified expectations, that no matter **where you live**, you can have access to essential services and appropriate cultural experiences;
- We have a great recognition of our **'place' in the world** – both in our region – the Asia Pacific region – and in the world;
- and we want to be challenged to experiment - and strive to be of the best standard, by any standard.

The preconditions are there for renewed and strong focus on our creativity and culture. We are a confident, diverse nation.

But the question arises, does the way in which arts and creativity are nurtured and supported, reflect the features – the goals and aspirations - of this modern diverse nation.

The consultation framework for the National Cultural policy asks this question. It is seeking feedback around four goals:

- 1) To ensure what the Government supports and how this support is provided – reflects the diversity of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, and protects and supports indigenous culture;
- 2) To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in the arts and culture;
- 3) To support excellence and endeavour of the highest standard, and strengthen the role that the arts plays in telling Australian stories both here and overseas;
- 4) To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and the economy.

Consultations are ongoing – and will close in mid-October. The consultation process is multi-faceted – it is not a simple submissions-based process. We are having workshops, working with a range of peak bodies and state governments, we want to talk to artists – this is important; and we want to speak with organisations; we have a website ([www.culture.arts.gov.au](http://www.culture.arts.gov.au)) with a survey and a means to lodge submissions.

On October 6, we are hosting a Digital Culture Public Sphere. Some of you know what this is, but if you are like me, it was new to me. Being driven through Senator Kate Lundy's office, the Public Sphere will be held in Sydney – it is an opportunity for people, no matter where they are, to contribute.

A web-based program, the Public Sphere used the best of breed traditional and online consultation tools and methods. Participants can contribute through the blog that has been established, using wiki, tweet, video-submissions, or by traditional email. I am also certain that if you like, you can stick something in an envelope with a stamp and mail us your thoughts!

Ministers will participate, so too a large number of key opinion leaders – most importantly, we expect hundreds of participants to help us shape our policy.

While a specific target is our digital culture and creative industries sector, it will be much more than that.

So what will the Policy look like? Consultations will assist frame the policy – but it is important to note that, at its core, the National Cultural Policy consultation framework outlines the clear intention of the government to modernise the role it plays in the arts – to ensure what the government supports and how it supports it reflects the diversity of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, and in particular to:

- support and value indigenous culture, including through the arts and language;
- resonate with a highly integrated multicultural society;
- be meaningful to people of all ages;
- actively reduce barriers to access;
- encourage and make the most of new art-forms and technologies;
- ensure its endeavours are measurable in impact.

This last issue, of being measurable is a fundamental issue. I put to you that for too long, our sector has had difficulty in developing the case for its support – it will be an important feature of our future work program, to develop the

metrics, the arguments that can allow us to convince the dark knights of treasury and finance of the material impact that arts and creativity has.

- The role of the arts to foster creativity and innovation;
- The role that arts plays in support of our broader social and economic objectives; and
- The role of the arts and artists in contributing to our society and the benefits that a culturally rich nation has.

In essence the Policy framework identifies these matters – and I'd like to talk briefly about the role of the Policy to mainstream the arts – and to nurture true excellence.

I would like to touch on these briefly – highlighting the role and value of music. Music can be a cornerstone of our cultural policy - because music plays such a major role in our society:

- We know music and its industries contributes around \$7 billion to our economy;
- There are around 12,500 professional practicing musicians – about 25% of the professional artist population;
- 10% of Australians play a musical instrument and 5% participate in organised singing;
- Half of the population attended a live performance in the last year;
- A third of our population attended a live contemporary music performance in the last year;
- Australia is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest market in the world for recorded music (nearly half a billion dollars).

And we are good at it. From the Sydney Symphony, the Australian Youth Orchestra, through to Goyte and Gurrumul – we produce, by any standard, artists at the highest level.

The bottom line is that the overall sustainability and viability of the music industry is important for the Australian economy as well our nation's cultural vibrancy.

We recognise this – the Australian Government has committed to finalise a Strategic Contemporary Music Industry Plan to support the growth, development and innovation across the Australian contemporary music industry.

This remains a priority, and it will be through the National Cultural Policy that we will be developing a longer-term vision of the contemporary music sector.

So too we are working with the Australia Council and the Major Performing Arts to identify the hallmarks of ‘excellence’, and shift the funding model so that it encourages and rewards true excellence. More on this later.

There is a lot that can be achieved – in a way it is a challenge to you, to work with us to work out how we can make the most of this.

### **Mainstreaming the Arts**

The Minister has often referred to a desire to ‘mainstream’ the arts – by placing the arts in a more prominent place in society, through ensuring it is a key part of education and community planning, and through using the arts to achieving broader social policy objectives, such as school retention, indigenous employment, social inclusion and support for those in greatest need.

And to support economic and business objectives – integrally linked with the ‘excellence’ agenda, this element highlights the emerging role of creative endeavours to achieve employment, trade and investment objectives, and is particularly focussed on technology-driven enterprises such as film and television, computer games, and emerging technologies.

A key focus of the policy will be to articulate and drive home to fundamental value and potential of arts and creativity is achieving our social and economic objectives.

The arts can underpin and add value across a range of matters:

- We see this in terms of the support for indigenous arts endeavours – through the network of over 70 Aboriginal Arts Centres, local economies are created, employment opportunities arise, and individual artists are given a platform;
- Arts and creativity, in recognising and promoting the multi-cultural society we are, can support the needs and interests of our diverse population – and in doing so build improved understanding.
- The NBN and digital economy – I have a strong view that if we do not move soon to ensure quality Australian content, then the opportunities that the NBN affords us will not be optimised – if we do not support quality local content, it will soon be filled by ‘less-nutritious’ overseas material. This will be position we take the table in terms of the ‘Convergence Review.’
- And this can be realised in digital content – packaged as knowledge transfer material for schools, researchers and anyone else; or also using the internet to broadcast, or stream live programs – for example Black Swan theatre has been broadcasting its Perth-based performances to a number of regional theatres.
- Opera Australia will have a season of its performance in Brisbane broadcast live to several regional centres.
- And in no sector is this technology being used more, for streaming of performances, than for musical performances.

But more can be done. I think a significant focus must be on the links between the arts and the education sector.

It is in schools that we develop our artists of the future; it is in schools that we develop our audience of our future; and it is in schools that we develop the creative thinkers of the future.

The national curriculum is an essential component of this. When I was growing up, at school, music was a fundamental part of my daily life – the teachers taught it, performed it, and we joined in.

The National Curriculum is only part of the solution. We need to be creative in how we work with the education sector – to train the teachers, to arrange for visiting ‘service providers – such as *Music A Viva* or the *Songroom*.

The National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to contribute your ideas.

### **Excellence**

While we are looking to use arts and creativity to underpin broader objectives – a key feature is also to promoting excellence and assisting artists achieve their best – through improved training opportunities, career development, and support for elite artists and companies.

The focus is on nurturing artist endeavour to allow the achievement of the highest possible standards. It recognises the intrinsic value of the arts, and the role that arts can play in telling Australian stories and as an avenue for enjoyment by many people.

As noted earlier, as a nation, we have a reputation for punching above our weight – for contributing significantly to the international music scene, across composition, performance, and recording.

A good illustration of our intentions in this regard is the work we are doing with the Australia Council, the States and Territories and the Major Performing Arts Organisations in developing a new financial model for supporting the MPA Companies.

It has been forecast that the significant majority of future investment in this sector will be focussed on ‘excellence’ – to reward those who meet benchmarks – to assist those that are truly of international standing take the next step. In return they will have access to the extra funds.

It will not be a grants process – it will not be by submission. There will need to be a process by which excellence is determined – and we will be seeking views on this.

I am keen to explore an arrangement of 'earned autonomy' whereby the truly excellent are given freedom in determining how to invest their new funding – whether it is for overseas touring, equipment upgrading, new recordings, additional performances or so on.

This is a good illustration of the need for us to rethink how we fund these elite organisations – to ensure that how we fund them reflects the importance of excellence.

In addition, I believe a key theme of the National Cultural Policy will be a clearer 'line of sight' between education in schools, training for the emerging elite artists, through institutions such as ANAM, the Australian Youth Orchestra, and universities; through to sustainable careers.

A key feature of the Policy will be the importance of education to nurture both the audiences of the future and the players of the future.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In drawing to a close, I'd like to make a couple of cautionary points. Rivers of gold are not likely to flow – it will also mean we think about our structures and processes. There are and will be many competing priorities. But it is an opportunity to present a case for change, if change is needed.

So final points:

- The National Cultural Policy will be a broad-ranging policy that spans all the areas of the arts and culture, and the many areas of Australian society that are touched by it.
- The role of music must be central to the Policy, because it reaches so many people, in all parts of Australia, whether they are active participants, audiences or both.
- Even those who would say that are not engage or interested in the arts and culture at all, are involved in music, in one way or another.
- Music is both broadly popular and specialist, experimental and traditional. It engages people like nothing else.

Thank you for inviting me here today – I look forward to receiving contributions in the development of the National Cultural Policy.